

Winter Wonderland of SUVs



Perfect picks for Katy families on the go Written by Don Armstrong

Auto manufacturers heard Katy families when they asked for SUVs with attractive amenities, decent fuel mileage, good looks, and the ability to go anywhere all while towing the family pop-up. We got a chance to drive a few new SUVs and found them more than worthy for your family's on-the-go lifestyle.

Multitasking Ford Edge

Another addition to Ford's stable of fuel-efficient vehicles is the new Ford Edge. Even though the Edge has been around a few years, the 2012 model year finds a new, even more fuel-efficient power plant under the hood. The updated Edge features an available 2.0-liter Ecoboost four-cylinder engine that boasts 21 miles per gallon city and 30 miles per gallon highway, while producing 240 horsepower. This option does add \$995 to the bottom line, but it is well worth it if you typically keep your vehicle more than two years. And, yes,

the 3.5-liter V-6 still comes standard.

This five-passenger mid-size crossover received a makeover last year and is now one of the sharpest vehicles in the bunch, both inside and out. There have been a lot of grumbings about Ford's driver interface, but we've found the My Ford Touch with Sync very capable. Once mastered, it becomes a great ally in multitasking as you juggle a cell phone call, hauling groceries back to the house, and a back seat full of kiddos screaming for an iPod selection. There are four trim levels to choose from, with pricing starting at \$27,640.

Superb Jeep Grand Cherokee

Completely redesigned last year, the new Jeep Grand Cherokee can now lay claim to no fewer than 30 awards and a sales increase of over 75% compared to the old model. Comparing the 2012 Cherokee to the old model is unfair,



GMC Terrain



Mercedes-Benz
GLK-Class



Ford Edge



Jeep Grand Cherokee



Toyota Highlander

though, since this one is an entirely new vehicle, from the ground up. The 2012 model gets either a 290-horsepower, 3.6-liter V-6 or the stump-pulling 5.7-liter V-8 that produces 360 horsepower and 390 pound-feet of torque, good enough for towing up to 7,400 pounds. Along with its Trail-Rated nomenclature, you could also say it has a major travel trailer rating.

The Grand Cherokee's ride is superb in either the RWD or 4X4 versions, and if you are a serious off-roader, the combination of Grand Cherokee's Quadra-Lift air suspension system and the Jeep Selec-Terrain traction control system lets you choose a 4x4 setting that will have you wondering why folks still buy a Range Rover. For those that love luxury, you must check out the Overland Summit edition with real wood trim and leather appointments that are comparable to the most expensive

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on the planet. The 2012 Jeep Grand Cherokee starts at \$26,995.

State-of-the-Art BMW X3

The Spartanburg, South Carolina-built BMW X3 is the second iteration of the model and one of the German company's most popular here in the U.S. Ride and handling are outstanding and the overall design, both inside and out, is state-of-the-art. Fit and finish are also attributes associated with the BMW brand.

BMW's answer to the driver interface is a thing called iDrive, a multifunction knob on the center console that controls audio, GPS, and climate, among other features. A 3.0-liter inline six powers both the 28i and the 35i. A super smooth eight-speed automatic transmission delivers power to a computer-controlled all-wheel drive system. Pricing for the BMW X3 28i begins at \$36,750. KM

DON ARMSTRONG'S knowledge and lifelong love affair with motorsports has earned him the reputation of being one of the area's most respected automotive journalists. He's a member of the Texas Auto Writer's Association.

More Winter Family Favorites

Mercedes-Benz GLK-Class

This upscale, entry-level offering from Mercedes-Benz starts at \$35,880. The 268-horsepower V-6 gets 16 miles per gallon city and 22 miles per gallon highway. Impress your neighbors.



GMC Terrain

This sharp-looking soldier from GMC fits between compact and mid-size with four- and six-cylinder engine choices. Starting at \$25,480, the Terrain deserves a test drive.



Toyota Highlander

We would be remiss if we didn't include a hybrid in our mix, and with a combined 28 miles per gallon, the Highlander seems a logical choice. Pricing begins at \$38,140.



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